

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION  
CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

February 1, 2022

Dear Hiland Park Baptist Church,

We write to notify you that our committee has received a request to consider the relationship between Hiland Park Baptist Church, Panama City, Florida, and the Southern Baptist Convention. Specifically, the request is to consider whether the church in a manner that is consistent with the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse. SBC Constitution Article III provides that a church will only be deemed to be in friendly cooperation with the Convention which "does not act in a manner inconsistent with the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse."

We recognize that neither the Southern Baptist Convention nor our committee has any investigative authority or power over Hiland Park Baptist Church or any other Baptist body. This is clearly stated in Article IV of the SBC Constitution. However, the Convention has a responsibility to determine for itself the churches with which it will cooperate. For that reason, the Southern Baptist Convention has tasked this committee to assist in resolving questions about whether a church is in cooperation with the Convention.

The information we received raises a concern that Hiland Park Baptist Church may be acting in a way that is inconsistent with the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse due to the church platforming Johnny Hunt, an individual who has been credibly accused of sexual abuse, according to the standards adopted by the Convention. In light of the information received, we ask that your church provide any information which it would like for our committee to consider. In addition, our committee would particularly like the church's response to the following:

SBC Constitution Article III reads as follows:

...  
1 The convention will only deem a church to be in friendly cooperation with the Convention, and sympathetic with its purposes and work (i.e., a "cooperation "church as that term is used in the Convention's governing documents) which:

...  
(4) Does not act in a manner inconsistent with the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse.  
...

The messengers to the 2021 Southern Baptist Convention adopted a

resolution regarding the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse as follows:

...  
"That the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, June 15-16, 2021, believe that any person who has committed sexual abuse is permanently disqualified from holding the office of pastor" and "That we recommend that all of our affiliated churches apply this standard to all positions of church leadership."  
...

The messengers to the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention adopted recommendations made by the Sexual Abuse Task Force which state:

...  
"an independent third party who has been hired by any church or other Baptist body, may determine, by preponderance of the evidence following an inquiry, that a pastor, denominational worker, or ministry employee or volunteer is credibly accused."  
...

Following a third-party investigation, it was concluded that a sexual assault allegation made against Johnny Hunt was found to be credible while "investigators did not find Dr. Hunt's statements related to the sexual assault allegation to be credible."

Given the information provided above, please help our committee understand how your church's recent decision to platform a credibly accused individual can be considered to be consistent with the Convention's beliefs regarding sexual abuse?

Whether your church chooses to respond to these questions or to provide any information in response to this letter is entirely up to the church. However, if your church declines to respond to this letter within thirty (30) days of receipt, it may be viewed as an indication that Hiland Park Baptist Church does not wish to be a cooperating church with the Convention. This is not our desire.

We are grateful for the partnership with your church in supporting the missions and ministries of the Convention and thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing back from your church at your earliest convenience. You may email your response to [credentials@sbc.net](mailto:credentials@sbc.net) or send by mail to SBC Credentials Committee, 901 Commerce Street, Nashville 37203.

Sincerely,  
The SBC Credentials Committee